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‘IMAD AL-DIN AL-IṢFAHANI’S AL-BARQ AL-SHAMI: A PARADIGM FOR CULTURAL MEMORY IN AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF THE ARABIC LITERARY TRADITION

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Abstract: **This paper aims at presenting ‘Imād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī’s (A.D. 1125-1201) memoirs of his association with Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, known in the West as Saladin (A.D. 1138-1193), and his purpose to enhance the identity of his people. ‘Imād al-Dīn rose to high rank in the service of the Sultans and the Caliphate in Baghdād and later was in the service of Nūr al-Dīn at Damascus and became secretary (*kātib*) to Saladin in A.D. 1175. In this post, he wrote an account of his experiences in the service of Saladin, entitled *al-Barq al-Shāmī* (*The Syrian Thunderbolt*) (A.D. 1166-1193). ‘Imād al-Dīn’s work is a historical account referring to the brief but glorious reigns of Nūr al-Dīn and Saladin, that saw the unification of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt into a single kingdom and the recapture of Jerusalem from the hands of the Crusaders who had held it for eighty-eight years (A.D. 1099–1187). Although ‘Imād al-Dīn’s work is framed as a life of Saladin, the narrative focus slips away to highlight the role of ‘Imad al-Dīn himself (*tarjama nafsah*).**

‘Imād al-Dīn’s historical account is in no sense an ordinary narrative chronicle. It is much more in the nature of a professional diary or record of the author’s secretarial activities, copiously illustrated with copies of or extracts from his own dispatches. Moreover, ‘Imād al-Dīn gives a detailed account of his day-to-day activities as a high-ranking administrative secretary. Emphasis is given to the role that ‘Imād al-Dīn played during the reign of Saladin and his own social commentaries regarding the ‘men of the pen’ and the ‘men of the sword’. Furthermore, ‘Imād al-Dīn’s autobiographical account focuses on the true moments of his personal glory. Certainly, ‘Imād al-Dīn shows a deep admiration for Saladin, but his greatness appears wholly as a corollary from the facts themselves, and only occasionally does he express some criticism of his master.

These memoirs are seen as a chronicle of events, with the remarkable feature that they are usually related in the first person plural, a practice that gives an impression of vanity and self-importance on the writer’s part. By constructing the past and thus its cultural memory, makes one suppose that ‘Imād al-Dīn relies upon the veracity and the ‘historical conscience’ and tries through his autobiographical memoirs to present important personal and national events. All these materials, though at times appear to be straightforward eulogies, aim at serving his patron as well as to instill confidence to his people. On the whole, it may be said that the various discourses of the past that are quoted

by ‘Imād al-Dīn aim at determining and enhancing the social and ethnic identity of his people.

Keywords: ‘**Imād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Barq al-Shāmī* (*The Syrian Thunderbolt*), Saladin, autobiographical memoirs, cultural memory, Arabic identity**.

I. INTRODUCTION

In this paper we focus on ‘Imād al-Dīn’s work entitled *al-Barq al-Shāmī* which is an autobiographical text written in Arabic language that represents the historical period and literary style of his own era. This encourages a further study of the Arabic autobiographical tradition and also brings Arabic practices to the attention of a wider audience and thereby broadens critical discussion of autobiography in general. According to D. F. Reynolds (2001 : 7),

> ‘Arabic has served as a scriptural language, a language of intellectual and religious discourse, and a written lingua franca throughout the Islamic world for fourteen hundred years’.

II. AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS A GENRE IN ARABIC LITERATURE

Autobiography as a genre is extremely rare in Arabic literature (Said, 1987; Humphreys, 1991; Hourani, 1962) and therefore there are hindrances to the study of Arabic autobiography due to three major factors: [1] there is a small number of examples that have been available to scholars, [2] those few texts have not been studied as part of a literary genre or historical tradition and [3] the early judgments of Georg Misch (1949-1969) and Franz Rosenthal (1937 : 1-40) that these Arabic texts do not constitute ‘true’ autobiographies (Reynolds, 2001 : 28).

The Arabic autobiographical tradition presents itself as a particularly important example by virtue of both its historical and its textual dimensions. Its origination goes to ninth – eleventh centuries and it has endured for more than a millennium (Reynolds, 2001 : 32).

Despite the fact that the earliest Arabic autobiographical writings seem to have been composed in isolation from one another, in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, there appears a cluster of distinctive and noteworthy autobiographical texts written by a group who lived in Damascus and Aleppo during and immediately after the time of Saladin. To whatever degree the authors influenced, motivated or inspired one another to interpret their lives in literary representations, they did so in a manner that satisfied their own individual needs and desires (Reynolds, 2001 : 59).

III. ‘IMAD AL-DIN AL-IṢFAHANI

‘Imād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī was a famous stylist and historian born at Iṣfahān in A.H. 519/ A.D. 1125. He studied jurisprudence, i.e. *fiqh*, in Baghdād and made journeys to many places. He has been appointed as government representative, i.e. *nā’ib*, at Wāsiṭ, as secretary, i.e. *kātib*, by the sultan Nūr al-Dīn and teacher, i.e. *mudarris*, in a *madrasa* built in his honour. Among the titles he received, it should be said that he was entrusted with a diplomatic mission to the caliph and ended by being appointed supervisor, i.e. *mushrif*, of the *Dīwān*. It is characteristic that ‘Imād al-Dīn

wrote as member of the educated élite of his time. After Saladin's death (A.H. 589/ A.D. 1193), he devoted himself to literary work until his death (A.H. 697/ A.D. 1201) (Massé, 1997 : 1157; Richards, 1993 : 133 ff.).

IV. THE WORK AL-BARQ AL-SHĀMĪ

The work entitled *Al-Barq al-Shāmī* (*The Syrian Thunderbolt*) (al-Iṣfahānī, 1987) was written by 'Imād al-Dīn at 562/1166-589/1193. This work is an autobiographical account or memoirs of his life with Saladin, whom 'Imād al-Dīn served as personal secretary (*kātib*) (Gibb, 1973; Rabbat, 1996). Therefore, he was well informed of Saladin's political activities and military campaigns. Of the original seven parts of this work, two parts are kept in the Bodleian Library, namely the parts on A.H. 573-574 (July 1177 – May 1180) and on A.H. 578 – beginning of 580 (May 1182 July 1184) (Massé, 1997 : 1158; Gibb, 1953 : 94-97). These texts are still in manuscript and have not yet been edited.

According to H. A. R. Gibb, the work *al-Barq al-Shāmī* was fairly rapidly forgotten owing to its verbose style and was replaced by the *Kitāb al-rawḍatain fī akhbār al-dawlatain* written by Abū Shāma, which this British scholar regards as an abridged version of *al-Barq al-Shāmī* and the *Fatḥ al-Quṣṣī fī l-fatḥ al-Qudsī*, also written by 'Imād al-Dīn (Gibb, 1950 : 59). Apart from Abū Shāma, various other historians made use of *al-Barq al-Shāmī*, including Ibn al-Athīr and Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī (Gibb, 1953 : 93).

'Imād al-Dīn's motivation for composing a written representation of his life next to Saladin was complex and often multifarious. Moreover, 'Imād al-Dīn wrote of himself as character in history interacting with the powerful and the mighty or as witness to great historical events.

The question arising is whether *al-Barq al-Shāmī* can be regarded as autobiography or 'self-narrative' or 'Imād al-Dīn's 'life representation'. 'Imād al-Dīn's history is in no sense an ordinary narrative chronicle. According to H. A. R. Gibb (1950 : 60),

> 'it is much more in the nature of a professional diary or record of the author's secretarial activities, copiously illustrated with copies of or extracts from his own dispatches, his semi-private correspondence with the al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil, diplomas of appointment to various posts composed by him, his literary and poetic occasions, and (less frequently) details of his private affairs'.

Since 'Imād al-Dīn accompanied Saladin almost without intermission from the summer of A.D. 1175 until his death, *al-Barq al-Shāmī* can be characterized as a chronicle of events. 'Imād al-Dīn includes narratives of a few events at which he was not present and relates events by reproducing one or more of his own or of the al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil's dispatches instead of by a direct narrative.

It is obvious that this Arabic writing that might be termed first-person literature or self-narrative, it appears to be a closest kin to the western idea of autobiography, mostly from the Arabic genres of *sīra* and *tarjama*. The practice that an author uses the first person plural inevitably gives an impression of vanity and self-importance on the writer's part (Gibb, 1950 : 60). The major criterion for characterizing *al-Barq al-Shāmī* as an autobiography has been that the text itself is presented as a description or summation of 'Imād al-Dīn's life and is viewed retrospectively from a particular point in time.

The stylistic features of the work are not uniform, but vary considerably from section to section. For example, Saladin is represented as speaking in rhymed prose, but except in one or two short set discourses the impression is one of natural and unaffected speech. For an author like 'Imād al-Dīn, a skilful master of language,

'the fact that his narratives are cast throughout in this medium does not at least detract from their clarity or their precision' (Gibb, 1950 : 60).

Some excursuses and introductions do not interfere with the whole narrative passages. In any case, 'Imād al-Dīn's statements are remarkably sober. In the work *al-Barq al-Shāmī* there are no comments either for or against. It is characteristic that 'Imād al-Dīn uses the pronoun 'we' avoiding to give his official identification of himself.

No attempt has been made in order to determine whether this work is 'real' or 'true' autobiography. Nor has a sharp distinction been made between autobiography and memoir, because, according to D. F. Reynolds (2001 : 10),

'although the two categories appear to be separate and clear in the abstract, when addressing actual texts this clarity often proves ephemeral'.

However, modern scholars such as L. Richter-Bernburg (1981 : 376), who have studied *al-Barq al-Shāmī*, speak of it as 'Imād al-Dīn's memoirs. Autobiographical references appear from the beginning of the work and as a part of the narrative. It is said that

''Imād al-Dīn's scattered autobiographical remarks reveal a high degree of complacency' (Lev, 1999 : 31).

The Arabic autobiography *al-Barq al-Shāmī*: a) preserves a description or summation of 'Imād al-Dīn's life, b) reveals considerably more about his personal and 'inner' life in his text, but much of this information should be examined in connection with the author's social milieu and literary strategy, c) reveals 'Imād al-Dīn's motivation for writing autobiography and d) reflects the ethical and religious implications of writing such an autobiography. This means that the work of 'Imād al-Dīn stands out for it is ostensibly a biography of Saladin. It could be said that this text can be commonly used as a historical source, and usually recognized and treated as autobiography. Since 'Imād al-Dīn wrote of himself extensively on this work, it was deemed an act of self-*tarjama* (*tarjama nafsah*) (Reynolds, 2001 : 55, 145).

'Imād al-Dīn explicitly states that his intension is to provide an account of his knowledge of Saladin, his relations with him and the services he rendered him. He also explains that his work will include the history of Saladin's family prior to their arrival to Syria, how he himself entered into Saladin's service and the record of Saladin's life year by year. Ibn Khallikan mentions that 'Imād al-Dīn

'entitled this useful book *The Syrian Lightning*, because the hours he spent in those days resembled the lightning flash in the pleasure which they gave and the rapidity with which they passed away' (*Ibn khallikan's Biographical Dictionary*, 1868, III : 303).

Ibn Khallikan also says that 'Imād al-Dīn began working on *al-Barq al-Shāmī* during his retirement

following Saladin's death. Specifically, the first part of this ten-volume work consisted of a description of 'Imād al-Dīn's own career in Iraq and Syria under Nūr al-Dīn as well as references to the circumstances which led him to withdraw into private life (Lev, 1999 : 31).

Moreover, *al-Barq al-Shāmī* refers to the brief but glorious reigns of Nūr al-Dīn and Saladin that saw the unification of Syria, Palestine and Egypt into a single kingdom and the recapture of Jerusalem from the hands of the Crusaders who had held it for eighty-eight years (A.D. 1099-1187). The question arising is whether a single work like that can portray two different lives and function simultaneously as both biography and autobiography. 'Imād al-Dīn narrates his life with Saladin. We observe Saladin's reign and his deeds through the eyes of 'Imād al-Dīn, his personal secretary and assistant. The distinction between 'the pen' and 'the sword' and the independence of the men who wield them is a constant motif within the narrative (Reynolds, 2001 : 144-145). 'Imād al-Dīn saw himself as belonging to the clerical class – a group distinct from the military.

To become more specific, 'Imād al-Dīn presents a detailed account – in the first person - of his daily activities being a high-ranking administrative secretary. These include: drafting reports, writing elaborately euphuistic proclamations, composing verses to be used as embellishments in the ruler's personal correspondence, buying books, attending public readings of poetry and lectures on religious topics, and even helping the ruler to organize public disputations over religious law in celebration of the holy month of Ramadan. 'Imād al-Dīn preferred to have a personal role during the reign of Saladin and to write social commentaries regarding the 'men of the pen' and the 'men of the sword'. In the analyzed work they are described true moments of 'Imād al-Dīn's personal glory,

> 'when he is selected by Saladin to draft the official proclamations sent out to all the cities of the realm announcing the reconquest of Jerusalem from the Crusaders' (al-Bundārī, 1971 : 313).

V. Some Episodes Drawn from the Work Al-Barq Al-Shāmī

A. The prologue of al-Barq al-Shāmī

In the prologue of *al-Barq al-Shāmī* (al-Bundārī, 1971 : 13), 'Imād al-Dīn praises the man who recognizes the value and acknowledges the generosity of the one who fostered and promoted him. He believes that a man who is appointed to the service of a master, he should return this benevolence by praising him after his death. This relates with him, who was selected as the secretary of the sultan Saladin and who was the person that Saladin allowed to write his praises after his death. He characterizes his association with Saladin as the 'best of company' (al-Bundārī, 1971 : 13). Then, 'Imād al-Dīn adds that the work *al-Barq al-Shāmī* was endowed by him with rhyming prose. Regarding the title of the work, 'Imād al-Dīn explains that he decided to call it *al-Barq al-Shāmī* (*The Syrian Thunderbolt*),

> 'because I arrived in Damascus in the month of Sha'bān 562 (1166 C.E.), during the reign of the Just King Nūr al-Dīn … and I found the state well structured and stable, its reputation strong, and its leadership benevolent under his rule and likewise during the reign of Saladin up till twenty-

seventh of the month of Safar in 589 (March 3, 1193 – the date of Saladin's death). I then saw that regime vanish as if in a sudden flash or the blink of an eye. All was over. Gone were the days, the nights, the months, and the years as if they had all been nothing but a dream' (al-Bundārī, 1971 : 17-21).

'Imād al-Dīn began to work on *al-Barq al-Shāmī* following Saladin's death fearing that the name of Saladin might fall into oblivion. He declares that his book aims at presenting some recollections of his days with sultan Saladin. He also describes the beginning of Saladin's rule and the circumstances of his arrival in Syria where he joined his administration. The exposition of the events is chronological since it is described every year of Saladin's life.

B. The distinction between the men of the pen and the sword

According to 'Imād al-Dīn, 'pen' provides endorsement while the 'sword' induces fear (al-Bundārī, 1971 : 14). 'Imād al-Dīn showed his loyalty's endurance and sang his praise in his writing. In his work *al-Barq al-Shāmī*, it is obvious that he revived Saladin's memory with his accounts and immortalized his deeds (Reynolds, 2001 : 147).

C. The arrival in Damascus

'Imād al-Dīn begins his autobiography by narrating his arrival in Damascus in May or June A.D. 1167. He states that he left Baghdād after the death of his patron, the vizier 'Awn al-Dīn Yaḥyā b. Muḥammad b. Hubaira, in A.H. 560/ A.D. 1164. The reason was that after his death, 'Imād al-Dīn felt oppressed. Then, he has been associated with a scholar from Damascus. In *al-Barq al-Shāmī* 'Imād al-Dīn describes that he enjoyed the scholar's company and says that he was amazed by the descriptions of the city offered by him. This was the reason for his decision to go to Damascus.

D. The introduction to Nūr al-Dīn

'Imād al-Dīn then gives some information concerning his visits to the *madrasa* where he attended the sessions and lessons of the *qāḍī* (judge) of Damascus, Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh b. al-Qāsim al-Shahrazūrī. Kamāl al-Dīn effected his introduction to Nūr al-Dīn who was in his service by the autumn A.D. 1167. Moreover, 'Imād al-Dīn narrates the visit of the Prince Najm al-Dīn to his home to meet him, because of his prior acquaintance with his uncle. 'Imād al-Dīn says that he has composed a poem in his honour

'in which I extolled his virtues and predicted the conquest of Egypt at the hands of his brother Asad al-Dīn and his son, Saladin, who had gone there on campaign for the second time' (al-Bundārī, 1971 : 22-23).

Asad al-Dīn used to spend enough time with 'Imād al-Dīn remembering the latter's uncle al-'Azīz and praising his memory.

Furthermore, 'Imād al-Dīn describes that the composition of a poem delivered to Nūr al-Dīn enabled him to enter his service as a scribe to his secretariat in the beginning of the year A.H. 563/ A.D. 1167. Since literary values dominated, it was the presentation of a panegyric ode, which gained 'Imād al-Dīn a post in Nūr al-Dīn's chancery (Reynolds, 2001 : 149; Richards, 1993 : 136).

E. The meeting with Saladin

When Nūr al-Dīn decided to go to Aleppo, Asad al-Dīn was sent a few days ahead of him. Before leaving, he entrusted ʻImād al-Dīn to his nephew, Saladin. ʻImād al-Dīn spent time in the company of Saladin.

ʻImād al-Dīn mentions that Saladin used to ask him to compose a few verses for him on yearning "so that he could insert them in his letters to those he missed and was longing to see" (Reynolds, 2001 : 150). He also makes a reference to the earthquake on June 29th, 1170 that affected the *madrasa* that ʻImād al-Dīn was in charge and as well as to the wish of his patron concerning the restoration of the prayer niche's gilding as a result of a dream (*manām*) that motivated Imād al-Dīn's action (al-Bundārī, 1971 : 23). To what extent should we accept ʻImād al-Dīn's assertion that he became in time not only the official secretary of Saladin, but also his personal confidant; certainly we know that his access to the Sultan gave him personal prestige and opportunities for enrichment (al-Bundārī, 1971 : 93).

The tasks that ʻImād al-Dīn undertook were: secretary in attendance, on campaign or in winter quarters, writer of letters, treaties, victory dispatches etc, all in the elaborate and rhyming prose. The fact that the Sultan consulted him on suitable appointments and for positions such tutor for one of his children effectively gave ʻImād al-Dīn powers of patronage. He belonged to that circle of intimates who stayed on after the emirs and officials had left the general audience. This gave privileged private access to the Sultan's ear.

F. The return to Cairo

Following ʻImād al-Dīn's description, emphasis is given to the way that he departed from Damascus and returned to Cairo. ʻImād al-Dīn tends to give in detail his hobbies there including attending poetry readings in Giza and al-Jazīra, participating in sessions in the *madrasas* and study circles, investigating literary and legal topics, literary discussions and ascetic readings with the sultan Saladin, composing letters according with what Saladin wanted to him etc (al-Bundārī, 1971 : 114-118).

We focus on the description regarding book sales that used to be held in the Fatimid palace. ʻImād al-Dīn mentions that he took advantage of the situation by buying a number of precious books. It is referred within the book that when Saladin informed it, he gave more books from the palace to him. ʻImād al-Dīn describes Saladin as a generous man, because 'it was his custom to give without making one ask for what one needed' (Reynolds, 2001 : 151).

ʻImād al-Dīn includes in his autobiography some information about the journey he made to the pyramids, the people he met there, their habits and the impression that Sphinx made to him (Reynolds, 2001 : 151).

G. How ʻImād al-Dīn saved from the battle of Rawla

It is characteristic that ʻImād al-Dīn admits that once he failed to accompany Saladin on his campaigns. This was Saladin's campaign against al-Ramla. The excuse he used was that he was a man of the pen, not of the sword. It is characteristic that he had an ominous feeling about this campaign. In any case, he asked Saladin to make the final decision about his participation in it. The sultan decided to go back and to pray for their victory at this battle. At the end, ʻImād al-Dīn confesses that God saved him from being present at the defeat of this battle of al-Ramla on 1

Jumādā II (on November 25th, 1177) (al-Bundārī, 1971 : 128).

H. How 'Imād al-Dīn avoided wielding the sword

The description of the way that 'Imād al-Dīn avoided wielding the sword covers another part of the work *al-Barq al-Shāmī*. The author narrates first that a number of Frankish Crusaders and some eastern Christians had tried to raid the city of Ḥamā for some time on 20 Jumādā I (14 November 1177), but the governor of the city defeated them. It is said, according to 'Imād al-Dīn's narration, that a great number of infidels had been brought to the camp of the sultan Saladin. The sultan asked 'Imād al-Dīn to draw his sword and to kill one of the infidels. His answer was

> 'I am a man of the pen and do not compete with swords. I announce victories but do not cause deaths. Please grant me this boy as a slave and let some warrior kill the captive you have designated for me' (Al-Bundārī, 1971 : 155-156).

Then 'Imād al-Dīn quotes Saladin's response to it saying retrospectively

> 'We will use this boy in exchange for one of the Muslim captives held by the Franks. Instead, we will give you a slave from among the prisoners brought in by the Egyptian fleet' (Al-Bundārī, 1971 : 155-156).

'Imād al-Dīn narrates that he was delighted by the outcome of events. He mentions that after his sword turned against killing, he did not lose anything by his decision not to spill blood. Paradoxically, he expresses his fear towards the company that might laugh at him.

I. Some other autobiographical events

The succeeding accounts deal with the events in Aleppo. Everything is presented in detail e.g. the describing of the torture of Gumushtegīn at Ḥārim. The brief narratives on events in Syria occupy nearly the year A.H. 574. They include - apart from the Frankish attack on Ḥamā - , the rebellion of Ibn al-Muqaddam, the siege of Baalbek and some other Frankish raids. The immediately following narrative describes in detail the battle at Merj 'Uyūn on June 9th, 1179 (A.H. 575). Then, 'Imād al-Dīn narrates the battle between Taqī 'l-dīn and the Seljuk Sultan of Konya.

The extant portion of volume V of *al-Barq al-Shāmī* opens with Saladin's march into Upper Mesopotamia in the late summer of A.D. 1182 (A.H. 578). 'Imād al-Dīn makes it clear that he had come north with the genuine intension of attacking Aleppo. He also describes the negotiations between Saladin and Bahā' al-Dīn, where he acted as negotiator on Saladin's behalf. Another event of this autobiography that is described at greater length is the death of Farrukh Shāh and his replacement as governor of Damascus by Ibn al-Muqaddam.

'Imād al-Dīn had devoted one of the most finished sections of the *al-Barq al-Shāmī* to Saladin's siege and capture of Āmid. The author also focuses on the capture of Tall Khālid and 'Aintāb, on the capture of a crusading galley and the repulse of a Frankish raid on Egypt and on the capture of Jerusalem.

In the next entry emphasis is given to the negotiations which followed at Damascus between the envoys of the Caliphate, of Mosul, and Saladin. This episode is handled at length in *al-Barq al-Shāmī*, since 'Imād al-Dīn played a leading part in it.

The following event in ‘Imād al-Dīn’s autobiography refers to a successful debate and the way he came to have a residence in Damascus. ‘Imād al-Dīn seemed to have a disagreement with Saladin concerning the jurists and the reward they should have. ‘Imād al-Dīn believed that reward was necessary for them since they were bearers of law and the interpreters of rules. On the other hand, Saladin expressed his anxiety concerning their polemics and their debates, which, according to him, ended in quarrels. Their disagreement extended even to the personalities of jurists with ‘Imād al-Dīn supporting their patience and their good manners and Saladin saying that it is probable to indulge in fights (al-Bundārī, 1971 : 286).

‘Imād al-Dīn also mentions the discourse and the beneficial argument took place where each jurist started by presenting his view and refuting the argument, correcting the mistakes and misinterpretations, providing the evidence, and solving the problem. The debate was carried further until everyone of the presents responded well and provided a good argument. All the sessions ended up being very beneficial for all. The result was that the sultan offered to all jurists robes and turbans in order to honour them (al-Bundārī, 1971 : 286-287).

In A.H. 582/ A.D. 1186-1187 ‘Imād al-Dīn places the building of his house in Damascus across the citadel. He mentions that he decided to built his house near Saladin’s residence so that he could attend him whenever he needed him for administrative purposes. Moreover, he reveals that this house is his dwelling and his resting place where his children reside and he composes his poetry and prose (al-Bundārī, 1971 : 288).

Then, ‘Imād al-Dīn explains how he wrote the proclamations of the reconquest of Jerusalem. He describes that his suffering from an illness deterred him from accompanying the sultan Saladin when the army was besieging Beirut. ‘Imād al-Dīn narrates that when the sultan wanted him to write a pledge of safe passage for the besieged, he asked to be excused from this task because of his illness. It is characteristic that none of the other scribes managed to draft the document. He mentions that he himself asked that God guided him to write the appropriate text and he did so. After that, he describes that he left for Damascus and rejoined Saladin after the conquest of Jerusalem (al-Bundārī, 1971 : 305).

‘Imād al-Dīn places his arrival in Jerusalem on October 3rd, 1187. He narrates that the sultan’s companions were pressuring him to order letters of proclamation to be carried to all the regions to announce the conquest. However, Saladin was reluctant to do so regarding ‘Imād al-Dīn being able to carry on this task. ‘Imād al-Dīn seems to consider his duties valuable mentioning that the sultan said

> ‘Your arrival today is another proof of the good omen of this conquest. This is your day! Prepare your pens and paper and draft me all the letters of proclamation, for all the provinces and regions are awaiting this great news!’ (al-Bundārī, 1971 : 313).

After that ‘Imād al-Dīn adds that he has written a number of letters in which he included all the details of the conquest prefacing each with great praise for the conquest and the conqueror (al-Bundārī, 1971: 313).

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study has focused primarily on specific elements and historical connections of some events and has not attempted to situate the work *al-Barq al-Shāmī* deeply within the specific context of the individual life and literary production of 'Imād al-Dīn. Such detailed analysis would, in any case, go far beyond the scope of a single study. The way that our information is presented, however, provides critical insights that will allow for more accurate assessments of individual texts when analyzed principally in their specific historical milieu.

It is a fact that the production of Arabic autobiographies continued over a millennium extending from the ninth to the nineteenth centuries and over a broad geographic expanse. The work *al-Barq al-Shāmī* reflects clearly the act of 'interpreting', 'representing' or 'portraying' 'Imād al-Dīn's life in written form. Nevertheless, it is clear that autobiographers in the Arabic tradition appear to have made independent voices concerning how much of what we would term their "private" lives to include in their works (Reynolds, 2001 : 243). It can be said that the analysis of 'Imād al-Dīn's autobiography uncovers the modes of self-representation, which he used to construct the description of his own individual identity. One may notice the recurring features of the portrayal of emotion through the description of his actions or the role of poetry as a discourse of emotion. A paradigm that proves the role of poetry as a discourse of emotion is reflected in 'Imād al-Dīn's phrase in his autobiography: "I missed my family dreadfully and expressed my feelings in verse at every stop on the road" (Al-Bundārī, 1971 : 114). In the Arabic literary tradition poetry has also been used as a rhetoric of emotion. For instance, it acts both as an alternative discourse that expresses personal feelings and as a means of lending emotional weight to the recounting of an event in an autobiographical narrative like here. In fact, this autobiography reveals the specific details of 'Imād al-Dīn's individual life and personality.

According to D. F. Reynolds (2001 : 243),

> 'cultures in different historical periods foreground different characteristics and behaviours as being more closely tied to the innermost identity of their members: piety, poetry, sexuality, handwriting, class, ethnicity, emotions, citizenship, and other concepts have all had their day at one time or another, in one culture or another, as reflections or constituents of the 'self''.

However, 'Imād al-Dīn's *al-Barq al-Shāmī* may offer a particularly rich source. It is an autobiography based on the relationship with a famous figure of his time, his patron Saladin. This Arabic autobiography demonstrates a concern with historical fact and truth that immediately involves methods of establishing the authority for certain statements. It is notable that the role of narrative plays a predominant role as a means of apprehending and presenting the life as *story*. As D. F. Reynolds (2001 : 246) remarks, "a second point of comparison between Arabic and western practices is closely connected to the western notion of life as narrative: chronological order".

The act of reconstructing the past from 'Imād al-Dīn's present is not a chronological or linear process, and even primary experience is not decoded linearly but rather with many mental leaps forward and

backward in time. 'Imād al-Dīn chooses rational criteria in order to divide his text, such as dividing the time line into periods such as years like a chronicle, or sometimes he groups the events according to thematic organization, devoting for example separate chapters to certain battles, his literally and poetic occasions etc.

This work is a frame or summation for revealing 'Imād al-Dīn's portrait in general. His acquired authority stems from his carefully listing his association with his patron Saladin, including the early years when both were still in the service of Nūr al-Dīn. It was also of consequence to establish the degree to which one had contributed to this body of knowledge by presenting the quantity and quality of his own intellectual or artistic production. On this, it is possible to make two observations. The first is that this work presents a personal self as the source of 'Imād al-Dīn's deeds. 'Imād al-Dīn was proud of his talents and accomplishments and conveys this to his readers. The second observation is that

> 'it would be a serious error to imagine that the rhetorical elaboration of *al-Barq al-Shāmī* is directed to mere eulogy of Saladin and fulsome flattery. There is scarcely a sentence, even in its loftiest flights, of direct panegyric of Saladin himself' (Gibb, 1950 : 70).

It is obvious that 'Imād al-Dīn shows a deep admiration for Saladin.

Finally, this autobiography which has been written from firsthand knowledge, includes important historical facts: it offers us in great detail the principles of Sultans and other officials administration. It can be absolutely considered as a source for the greater part of Saladin's public career. Furthermore, this Arabic source for the history of Saladin is both exceptionally authoritative in regard to its author's knowledge of the facts and trustworthy in regard to his presentation of them.

So all these materials of 'Imād al-Dīn's autobiographical memoirs aimed at encouraging and instilling confidence to his people by making them feel proud of the deeds of their leaders. Moreover, the memory of such glorious events served the construction and determination of the social and ethnic identity of his people. Indeed 'Imād al-Dīn presents important personal and national events aiming at constructing a glorious past for his people and in turn a collective memory for the future generations. As seen in later authors, these narrations have become part of the cultural memory and survived for a long time, and thus influenced the attitudes of the following generations.

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